

THE PRINCE OF HILARIA

Tale of the Influence of a Clever Jester in a King's Unhappy Court

By RALPH WILBUR

THE King of Lugubria rode sadly beside the chief of his Wise Men taking his afternoon exercise. As they went along the people hushed their voices to whispers and stood with hats off until they were well past, for the King was suffering from an attack of sadness so severe that the slightest sound irritated him.

His three Wise Men, who were said to know everything, could not fathom the mystery, nor could the Court Fool, who though only four feet high was considered the biggest fool on earth, do anything to bring a smile to his face. Indeed, he had been ordered to keep away from him, and he had sent his daughter, the beautiful Princess Alegria, to an old crone who lived in a dismal castle on an island in the lake to be taught the serious things of life; for it was said that the old crone had not even smiled in one hundred years, and insisted that there was a serious side to everything, if people only knew how to look for it. Presently the Wise Man, whose ears were sharper than the King's, became a little nervous, and said: "Your majesty, shall we vary the route to-day and ride eastward instead of westward?"

The King looked searchingly at him as he responded: "Why?"

"Perhaps," was the answer, "perhaps, if we vary the route, something different may happen."

"Ah!" said the King sadly, "you must be near the end of your wisdom when you begin to talk of the perhappes of life. Do we not know the best and the worst of this route? Is it not bad enough? Still, I will do as you say;" and so they turned down a narrow alley and went on until they came in front of an inn, over the door of which hung a sign having painted on one side the picture of a laughing baby and on the other that of one crying, while on the wall was painted:

THE BOTH SIDES HOTEL

Be cheerful if you can. If you can't, cry.
If you find our meat tough, try the gravy.
If our beds are hard, try the floor.
If you don't like our wine, try the water.
If you don't like the location, move the hotel.
If things ain't as good as they might be,
Perhaps they're as bad as they can be.
When trouble comes, duck your head and it may miss you.
If it hits you, hit it back.

Just as they read this the sounds of loud laughter, clapping of hands and stamping of feet were heard inside, followed by a song, in the chorus of which many voices joined, while some whistled and some clapped their hands. The song had many stanzas, but when two had been sung the noise ceased, as some one discovered the King and the Wise Men listening. What they heard was this:

THE KING WHO LOOKED FOR TROUBLE

O, a King there was who everything had
In quadruple, triple or double.
He counted his jewels, castles and gold,
And found that he lacked only trouble.
So he moaned and sighed, whimpered and cried,
As his happiness burst like a bubble,
And he ordered his subjects far and near
To procure him a big crop of trouble.
But when the crop came, he was not content;
For he wanted the root and stubble,
And feared day and night, the hapless old wight,
Than he some one else had more trouble.
So he moaned and sighed, whimpered and cried,
As his happiness burst like a bubble,
And he told his Wise Men, his Fool and cook
To mix him a big brew of trouble.

When they stopped, the King said sadly to his Wise Man: "How strange that this should happen in my Kingdom! How strange that a man should seek trouble when there's nothing else in the world; and stranger yet that there should be addle-pated, empty-headed, worthless oafs to laugh at it! It behooves us to inquire into this. Perhaps the man found more troubles than I have. You must bring those triflers before me in the morning."

With this they finished their ride and went back to the castle, whence a messenger was despatched to the inn with the King's command.

Now all this happened in Spain, in one of those cities built entirely of castles; and the news spread rapidly; for after the few daily duties were performed

the others nudged each other and giggled at the bravery and merriment of his answer.

"So," said the King, frowning, "that is all you can say for yourself? Well, perhaps you can tell us if the King in the song found the trouble he was after, and what it was. I am familiar with trouble myself."

"Indeed he did, your majesty!" gaily replied the youth. "But there was so much of it that I fear I can tell you only what he found in one day; but that was funny enough, goodness knows!"

"Funny?" exclaimed the King. "What is funny about trouble?"

"Oh, everything," laughed the minstrel. "Just think of it! One morning when he stepped out of bed he trod on a tack. This made him jump so that he struck a chair with his shin. This made him so mad that he hurled a boot at a servant who entered with hot water. The boot missed the servant, and crashed through his best mirror. The hot water scalded the pet dog, which rushed at the cat,

which sprang at the parrot, which flew in the face of the Queen, who entered to learn the trouble. Then the Queen fell back against the maid, who fell downstairs and hit the butler who was coming up. The cook rushed out and opened the door just in time to see the butler turn a back somersault through it and land in a big trough of batter. The cook, who did not like the butler, laughed so heartily that he had a fit, and fell against the smoke pipe, which fell, and the soot spoiled the King's breakfast. Now—"

But by this time the innkeeper, who had held in as long as he could, slapped his thighs and roared with laughter. All the others, who had been tittering and giggling during the

recital, joined him. The King's Fool added to the merriment by turning handsprings and somersaults in the air until he resembled an animated pinwheel sputtering laughter. Even the Wise Men crammed their handkerchiefs into their mouths; and while the King regarded it all with open-eyed and open-mouthed surprise, it was noticed that there were some suspicious wrinkles on his face which threatened to unite into a smile.

When order at last had been restored, the minstrel continued: "Oh, yes, your majesty, for a man who had never looked for it before, that King found quite a little trouble, even before breakfast. Well, as the cook was sick, his majesty had to put up with a cold meal, which gave him dyspepsia. Then he ordered his horse for a ride; but the Equerry told him that the Chancellor had run away with all the ready money, and before going had loosed all the horses from the stables so that he could not be pursued, and there was nothing left except the elephants, which had arrived the day before and for which the men were still awaiting payment.

"He therefore ordered the elephants brought, and mounting one he led the way in a chase after the Chancellor. Prodding his mount with an iron point, he forced him on a bridge which spanned the little river. The bridge broke, and King and elephant were soon floundering around in the mud and water, the one trumpeting and the other bawling for help. When they were fished out, the King rushed to his castle and pulled a rope to summon his body-servants. Instead of being the bell-rope, as he supposed, it was the one connecting with the ponds on the roof of the castle to be used in case



it was the custom of the people, even those who lived in humble little castles having only one room, to go from neighbor to neighbor and tell and hear all the news. So next morning a great crowd was waiting in the King's audience-chamber to learn the fate of the innkeeper, the minstrel and the men who had broken the law and made merry.

When all was ready, the King bade the culprits form a half-circle in front of him, with the minstrel in the center. He was a rosy-cheeked, graceful young man, with dancing blue eyes, a wealth of yellow curls tumbling down his shoulders, across which there passed a band of frayed red ribbon to which was slung his guitar. His clothes, though of fine material, were faded and tattered; neither his stockings nor shoes were mates; but he waved his hat, decorated with a chicken feather, in a courtly manner as he bowed low before his majesty.

The King regarded him wearily for a moment, then in a sad but severe voice said: "Young man, I heard you yesterday in a most extraordinary place singing an unusual song in an objectionable manner, to a strange tune and an outlandish company. Explain who you are, why, whence, whither, wherefore."

"All this," said the minstrel, "I would gladly do if I could; but unfortunately I have vowed to forget who I am; why, I cannot tell; whence, would take too long; whither, I know not; wherefore, being healthy and well fed, I am happy. Desiring nothing, I have lacked nothing in the past, and feel that I shall continue to lack it in the future. If not, I shall be either too stupid to know it, or too dead to tell of it," and he laughed merrily.

The King and the Wise Men glared severely; but